

Blue Drum: Annual Report 2025

Profile

The Arts Specialists Support Agency trades as Blue Drum and was established in 2002. Blue Drum supports community-led arts and cultural work with the changing circumstances of communities facing disadvantage and systemic barriers to art and culture. At the end of 2025, the organisation completed a comprehensive governance restructure in advance of developing a new strategic plan.

The three directors named in the statutory accounts served throughout the financial year. A new eight-member board was inducted in December 2025 and assumed its full governance responsibilities from January 2026. A Strategy Sub-Group has been tasked with developing a new strategic plan under a two-year board mandate (2026–2027), with quarterly meetings combining online sessions and annual in-person gatherings.

The new board are: Chair: Niall Crowley (Dublin), Vice Chair: Eleanor Phillips (Wicklow), Company Secretary: Mary Doherty (Dublin), Members: Catherine O'Halloran (Limerick), Gwen Stevenson (Tyrone), Fiona Woods (Clare), Dave Donovan and Jim Ahern (Galway).



*Images: 2025 Coproductions with partners
Loughinstown 50 (100 participants) and Beir Bua - Jai Ho (400 participants)*

Partners and Associates

Supporting partnerships are essential to Blue Drum's model of long-term community engagement and this is reflected in the work with:

- **Local Authority and Education Partners:** Dublin City Council, Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council and Dublin College (Architecture Technology programme).
- **The Arts Council**

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- **International networks:** European Anti Poverty Network, United Cities Local Government, and the Council of Europe Faro Convention Network
- **Community Partners** including Charlemont Community Resource Centre, Women's Collective Ireland (Dún Laoghaire Rathdown), Loughlinstown Estate Management, and the Bougainvillea Eco-Art Trust (India).

In 2025, Blue Drum received €53,107 in project grant funding and spent €56,255 delivering its programme, resulting in a deficit of €3,148. Here is a list of income received for projects:

Dublin City Council	€18,420.00
The Arts Council	€18,497.00
Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council	€4,900.00
Loughlinstown Estate Management	€2,350.00
Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council Creative Communities	€2,000.00
Cork Street Fund	€2,000.00
Rotary Club of Dún Laoghaire	€307.00

Blue Drum continues to operate without core or revenue funding.

Ed Carroll is interim part-time director. Eight commissioned artists delivered project work: Carmel Ennis, Ciara Keegan, Vita Gelūnienė, Darius Petrulis, Brian Fleming, Catherine Young, Chiman Dangi, and Jigar Nagda. Additional collaborating artists included Gavin Murphy, Siobhan Madden, and Joanna Marsden. Artists Sheelagh Colclough and Niall O Baoill invested their time to facilitate SOUNDINGS sessions across Ireland and Northern Ireland. More than 70 participants across 14 sessions contributed lived experiences and knowledge.



Beir Bua: Catherine Young in Gourela, India (Left) Ellen Rowley (UCD) and residents (Right)

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Images: D. Petrulis for Who is My Neighbour, Loughlinstown

Research

SOUNDINGS: *Mapping how the arts found traction in communities from the 1980s onwards*

Between June and September, Dr Sheelagh Colclough and Niall O Baoill facilitated fourteen conversations with long-established community arts practitioners across Ireland and Northern Ireland — from Belfast and Derry to Dingle and Gweedore. Grounded in openness, friendship, and inquiry, these sessions traced the origins and evolution of the community arts movement across four decades.

Audio-recorded with consent, the conversations explored how practitioners first entered the field, how knowledge and methods evolved over time, and whether the values that once defined community arts remain visible in today's socially engaged practice.

Three themes emerged with particular clarity:

- On origins, practitioners recalled how flexible training and employment schemes created entry points, and how learning happened by doing — alongside communities.
- On challenges, the erosion of those pathways, the rise of professionalisation without lived experience, and a growing sense of isolation and burnout were highlighted.
- On longevity, what sustained people was community, activism, storytelling, and the quiet power of meaningful collaboration.

Practice Sites

Approaching 25 years of practice, our programme strands follow avenues of inquiry such as: How can community arts and cultural practices evolve to meet the ever-changing dimensions of need within our communities, and what does this reveal about building a progressive agenda for change?

Loughlinstown

The Loughlinstown mapping project in the area managed by Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council (dlr) used participatory workshops to explore memories, public spaces, and nature. We facilitated community storytelling sessions and site visits, building relationships with key stakeholders including Women's Collective Ireland dlr, dlr Loughlinstown Estate Management, and dlr Community/Arts/Heritage teams. By working alongside local workers and volunteers it was possible to facilitate meaningful dialogue about the wear and tear on public space. The mapping project successfully:

- Established a research baseline;
- Raised awareness of cultural and heritage value;
- Built trust and engagement across community groups;
- Sparked cross-departmental collaboration in the council.

Key public events included:

Day-long community event at Eurofound with 100 participants marking Loughlinstown's 50th anniversary. Featured community discussions, poetry, film screenings, historical reflections on 1970s housing development, and international case studies from Vienna, Kaunas, and Novi Sad. Concluded with nature walk and communal supper.

Open House Exhibition (15–27 October): Brought Open House Festival to Loughlinstown for the first time as part of Open House Europe's 'Future Heritage' theme. Community and family portraits from five cities installed on Loughlinstown Linear Park fence, seen by approximately 1,000 passers-by over 12 days. Live portrait sessions connected residents across sites.



Images 2025: Who is my Neighbour, Loughlinstown and Best Green Garden, Charlemont

Charlemont - green culture garden

Together, participants planted 200 tulip bulbs, potted cuttings and seedlings, composted organic waste, and installed 10 apple trees. Each session ended with tea and scones—a simple ritual that transformed practical gardening work into genuine social connection.

To deepen residents' knowledge, organisers arranged a community field trip in March to Basin Lane and Liberties Gardening Projects. These visits connected Charlemont residents with established gardening communities

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and built Charlemont's green culture garden began with a simple vision: to transform the French Mullen Deck—a 15m × 20m outdoor podium that had long sat underutilised—into a community gardening place. Artist Carmel Ennis took the lead, running 10 Saturday drop-in gardening workshops that drew 40 adult participants. Ciara Keegan facilitated children's workshops, linking them to the Wednesday Curry Club. A valuable knowledge exchange networks.

As the weeks progressed, something remarkable began to take root. Bernie Burton, Kevin O'Brien, and Kevin Wojicka emerged as core participants, becoming the heart of the initiative. The Saturday morning sessions created bonds that extended beyond the Deck—neighbours began sharing gardening tips across balconies, and cross-tenure interaction flourished. The space had become a visible focal point for resident engagement. One resident captured the transformation perfectly: "I look out from my balcony and now, after your work, I see something that soothes me."

The ripple effects extended far beyond Charlemont. Media coverage in Southside News and Dublin Gazette brought visits from the Cherry Orchard Travellers Group, expanding the network of connections. A partnership with the Irish Architecture Foundation emerged for October Open House development, and the project earned recognition on the Irish Times long list of 'best green community'—a peer-selected national honour.

As Fiachra Ó Mathúna reflected on it being shortlisted as an Irish Times 'best green community': "The Green Culture Garden has helped real community building. We don't know what will grow but it's seeded."



Posters: Loughlinstown Mapping (February 2025) and Charlemont Garden (January 2025)

Beir Bua: Irish India Cultural Corridor

Between October and December, a three-month Three-Month artist residency took place in Gourela Village, Udaipur, Rajasthan. Four Irish artists and arts practitioners—Ed Carroll, Brian Fleming, Niall O'Baoill, and Catherine Young—partnered with Rajasthani artists, Irfan Ali, Chiman Dangi and Jigar Nagda in exploring and fusing Irish and Indian dance and drumming traditions. Documentary makers Jigar Nagda, Vita Gelūnienė and Oscar O'Baoill captured the process.

Specialised workshops led by Sadam Khan Lahja (Kharta hand clapping), Vipra Sukhwai (Kathak dance), Gyan Singh (Tabla drumming), and T.S. Sodha (Sufi devotional songs). Training built capacity across children, young people, and adult leaders among Bhil tribal people.

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Informal sessions, formal house concert, and major outdoor event 'Jai Ho Gourela' (19 December) celebrating cross-cultural fusion. Arts studio in Gourela village constructed with traditional roof and flooring through GoFundMe campaign, publicly opened at the final gathering.

The partnership structure included collaboration with Bougainvillea Eco Arts Trust, Art Junction, and West Zone Cultural Centre, establishing respectful intersecting circles between artists, organisations, the rural community.

The immediate impact showed high participation levels from within the tribal community and its children. Successfully fused Irish–Indian traditions through co-designed, site-specific collaborative practices. It has also established a cultural corridor between Ireland and India and cultivated institutional connection to the Irish embassy, in Delhi.



Images: O. O'Baoill. 2025: Screenshots, Beir Bua: India

Media

Film: Open House 2025. Who is my Neighbour
Loughinstown: <https://vimeo.com/1137012730>

Film: Open House 2025. Who is my Neighbour Charlemont:
<https://vimeo.com/1133369387>

Film: Open House 2025. Loughinstown 50 Gathering
<https://vimeo.com/1128004599>

Film: Beir Bua 2025. <https://vimeo.com/1154310654>

Film: Bougainvillea Retreat 2025
<https://vimeo.com/1154934984>

Film: Beir Bua: Jai Ho 2025. <https://vimeo.com/1147203524>

Online journal: [2025 Open House Dublin](#)

Online journal: [2025 Museum of UnRest](#)

Presentation: [Loughinstown Mapping](#) (April 2025)

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Information

Legal Structure:

Company No: 364118 | Charity Number:14699

Charity Regulator Number: 20048549

Annual Accounts:

Unaudited Financial Statements 2025 are available: [HERE](#)



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